

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----031042 291453Z /41

P R 291315Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4475
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 9750

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, JO, SY, XF
SUBJECT: ABD AL MUNIEM RIFAI - VIEWS ON JORDAN POLICY

SUMMARY: SCION OF THE RIFAI CLAN AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER, ABD AL MUNIEM RIFAI, MAINTAINS WIDE CONTACTS AMONG THE SYRIANS AND PLO SYMPATHERIZERS IN JORDAN AND THE REGION. HE SUGGESTS THAT JORDAN TAKE A MORE FORWARD ROLE IN NEGOTIATING FOR THE WEST BANK. HE REVIVES A FORMER RIFAI SUGGESTION THAT THIS BE DONE BY NEGOTIATING WITH THE PLO TO REPRESENT IT IN WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SUPPORT AND APPROBATION OF SYRIA. RIFAI KNOWS THE LONG STANDING ENMITY OF THE PLO FOR JORDAN BUT BELIEVE CONDITIONS ARE NOW RIGHT FOR IT TO PICK UP THE PLO'S PROXY. BEGIN WOULD HAVE TO GIVE, IF NECESSARY THROUGH THE US, AND ASSURANCE THAT WITHDRAWAL FROM TERRITORY OCCUPIED IN 1967 WAS POSSIBLE (NOT ALL TERRITORY RIFAI SAID) OR THAT ISRAEL WOULD END THE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF THE WEST BANK, WITH PRESENCE OF ITS TROOPS ON SOME CONTINUING BASIS FOR SECURITY REASONS TO BE SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATIONS. THIS WOULD ASSURE KING OF A STRONG HAND IN ARRANGING THE QUESTION AS OUTLINED ABOVE. END SUMMARY

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1. ON DECEMBER 29 I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO CALL ON FORMER PRIME MINISTER ABD AL MUNIEM RIFAI, SCION OF THE RIFAI CLAN AND LOCAL NOTABLE. CONVERSATION LASTED A LONG TIME AND WAS FILLED WITH RIFAI'S OWN ANALYSES OF THE SITUATION. RIFAI IS PARTICULARLY CLOSE AT THIS POINT TO THE SYRIANS AND KEEPS IN TOUCH AS WELL WITH A WIDE GROUP OF PALESTINIANS IN CONTACT WITH THE PLO

AND ALSO A WIDE NUMBER OF EAST BANK FIGURES. RECENT REPORTING IN OTHER CHANNELS HAS CONVEYED MUCH OF WHAT HE HAD TO SAY. IT WAS INTERESTING THAT HE ALSO NOTED THAT HE HAS RECENTLY BEEN IN CONTACT WITH CROWN PRINCE HASAN (CONSTANTLY BLAMED BY THE RIFAI IN THE PAST FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAS GONE WRONG IN JORDAN, AND THAT HAS BEEN A GOOD DEAL), AND EAST BANKER COURT CHIEF SHARAF.

2. RIFAI TOLD ME THAT SYRIAN AMBASSADOR HAD SEEN HIM "OVER TWENTY TIMES" IN LAST FEW WEEKS AND HAD JUST GONE TO DAMASCUS TO GET "NEW DIRECTIVES". HE CONCLUDES THE SYRIANS VERY MUCH WANT TO KEEP LINES OPEN TO JORDAN. HE ALSO SAID THAT SYRIANS PUT OUT FEELERS TO GET HIS NEPHEW AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER ZAID RIFAI TO CALL ON ASAD. THE LATTER RIFAI LEFT FOR LONDON A FEW DAYS AGO, NOT HAVING SEEN THE KING A NECESSARY CONDITION PRECEDENT TO A VISIT TO ASAD ON HIS PART.

3. AT THE BOTTOM OF ALL HE HAD TO SAY WAS AN INTERESTING SUGGESTION. RIFAI SAYS THAT JORDAN NOW HAS NO POLICY, JUST A POSTURE OF SITTING IN THE MIDDLE. (I TOLD HIM I HAD SOME SYMPATHY FOR THIS ASSESSMENT). WHAT JORDAN NEEDS TO DO IS TO DECIDE TO TAKE A STRONG POSITION TOWARD PARTICIPATING IN ENGOTIATIONS. RIFAI SHOWS NO LOVE FOR HIS FORMER CLOSE CONFIDANT ANWAR SADAT, BUT HE SAYS THAT EVERY OPENING TO NEGOTIATION SHOULD BE EXPLOITED AND THAT THE SADAT INITIATIVE
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SHOULD BE SAVED, NOT BECAUSE OF SADAT PERSONALLY, BUT BECAUSE HE HAS OPENED UP A NEW VISTA.

4. JORDAN MUST DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE IN NEGOTIATIONS ON THE WEST BANK AND SOON. THE KEY TO THIS WILL BE SYRIA AND THE PLO. JORDAN CAN GO TO SYRIA, HE BELIEVES, AND GET IT TO AGREE THAT JORDAN SHOULD MAKE A DEAL WITH THE PLO TO REPRESENT IT IN WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS. THIS WOULD BE REASONABLY EASY BECAUSE ASAD STILL WANTS TO SEE THE PEACE PROCESS MOVE AHEAD, BUT CANNOT DO IT NOW WITH SADAT. JORDAN WOULD ALSO AGREE NOT TO MAKE AN AGREEMENT ALONE AND TO TRY TO OPEN UP THE WAY ON THE GOLAN FOR SYRIA TO JOIN LATER AT GENEVA. JORDAN COULD ALSO REFUSE TO AGREE TO ANY SEPARATE DEAL FOR EGYPT AND HELP TO KEEP SADAT IN CHECK. THE PLO, RIFAI BELIEVES WOULD OR COULD BE BROUGHT TO AGREE TO TERMS FOR SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT, PARTICULARLY IF IT LOOKS AS IF JORDAN HAD A REAL CHANCE TO MOVE AHEAD TO GET THE TERRITORY BACK. INDEED, THEY MIGHT HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE PARTICULARLY IF SYRIA WANTED IT THAT WAY.

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P R 291315Z DEC 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4476
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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EXDIS

5. I TOLD RIFAI I WAS SCEPTICAL THAT EITHER SYRIA OR THE PLO WOULD GO ALONG WITH SUCH A PROPOSAL, PARTICULARLY IF ISRAEL MAINTAINED ITS PRESENT POSTURE OF NOT MOVING ON THE WEST BANK TERRITORY. RIFAI SAID THAT HE THOUGHT EITHER ONE OF TWO THINGS FROM BEGIN WOULD HELP JORDAN GET INVOLVED. THE FIRST WOULD BE A DECLARATION THAT ISRAEL WOULD WITHDRAW FROM TERRITORY OCCUPIED IN 1967. IT DID NOT HAVE TO SAY ALL TERRITORY, BUT IT HAD TO ADMIT OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME WITHDRAWAL. THE SECOND WOULD BE THAT ISRAEL WOULD END THE MILITARY OCCUPATION. THAT DID NOT MEAN THEY WOULD HAVE TO AGREE TO WITHDRAW TROOPS, THE CONTINUING TROOP PRESENCE COULD BE NEGOTIATED ABOUT IN THE CONTEXT OF ISRAELI SECURITY. UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS, JORDAN WOULD HAVE ENOUGH NEGOTIATING ROOM TO GET TACIT SYRIAN SUPPORT AND BRING ALONG THE PLO. WHEN I TALKED ABOUT SYRIA'S PRESENT POSTURE, RIFAI SAID THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT ASAD'S REQUEST TO SEE ZAID RIFAI WAS AN OPENING IN WHICH TO EXPLORE SOMETHING LIKE THIS. ASAD HAD SENT TOO MANY MESSAGES THROUGH HIS AMBASSADOR SEEKING TO IMPROVE THE DIALOGUE WITH JORDAN TO HAVE MUCH DOUBT THAT THERE WAS A REAL POSSIBILITY OF SOMETHING LIKE THIS WORKING. UNFORTUNATELY THE KING ONLY SENT PEOPLE LIKE SHARAF AND BADRAN TO SEE ASAD WHO WOULD NOT STICK UP FOR THE JORDANIAN

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POSITION WITH ASAD AND HAD NO POLICY SENSE. WHEN I POINTED OUT ALSO THE PROBLEM OF TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE PLO MANY MEMBERS OF

WHICH MIGHT SPEAK OUT AGAINST ANY SUCH ARRANGEMENT, RIFAI SAID THAT FATAH AND ARAFAT CAN WELL CONTROL A LARGE SECTOR, WITH MUHSIN AND THE SYRIANS BRINGING SAIQA ALONG. THE OTHERS, HABBASH AND JIBRIL FOR EXAMPLE, WERE SUPPORTED BY IRAQ, WERE THUS IRRELEVANT, AND IT DID NO HARM NOW TO PRECIPITATE A BREAK IN THE PLO.

6. RIFAI UNDERSTANDS THE CURRENT CONCERN IN JORDAN ABOUT GETTING OUT TOO FAR AHEAD OF THE OTHER ARABS. BUT HE INSISTS IT IS TIME FOR JORDAN TO BEGIN WORKING ON A POLICY AND SEES HIS NEPHEW, AND PERHAPS HIMSELF WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, WORKING IT ALL OUT WITH THE SYRIANS AND THE PLO. HE BELIEVES THAT THE US SHOULD NUDGE THE KING IN THIS DIRECTION AND THAT IT IS A MISTAKE FOR US TO GIVE THE KING HIS HEAD RIGHT NOW. HE ALSO SEES THE US AS CRUCIAL IN GETTING FROM BEGIN THE NECESSARY ASSURANCES OR DECLARATION, WHICH COMING FROM US, HE SAID, WOULD SATISFY THE SYRIANS IN THE SCENARIO.

7. COMMENT: WHILE MANY OF THE IDEAS GO AGAINST OUR ACCEPTED ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON WHAT TO DO AT THIS POINT, RIFAI HAS HAD LONG EXPERIENCE IN THE AREA AND GOOD CONTACTS IN CIRCLES OUT OF OUR REACH. IN ADDITION, SOME OF THE IDEAS CONTAIN SOME INTERESTING SUGGESTIONS ON TACTICS AND ATTITUDES. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ANY COMMENTS, PARTICULARLY FROM BEIRUT, DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV.
PICKERING

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Message Attributes

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